

Beyond Earth Spirituality



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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Cover View of the Earth, looking down on the Arctic. NASA photo

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Inquiring Words

Let me pray for someone else. Someone who is known to me. Think of them, send them blessings, empathise with the challenges and struggles of their lives, celebrate their successes. Pray that what they wish for may bring them the rewards they expect.

Bring them into the circle of people I pray for.

Let me pray for that person I do not know, that no one seems to know, who suffers the trials of life alone and is often swamped by them. Give them a place in the circle of people I pray for.

Let me pray for myself, that I can focus on the needs of others without thinking how it affects my life, may I not try to manage their lives as if they were my own.

May the circle of people I pray for always be full and my prayer put love and energy into it. And may I be grateful for the source of my own well being.

— Tony McNeile

Editor's view

Time to open up the process

In 2005 the General Assembly created the Executive Committee (EC), replacing the District Council – a 26-member body of members from across the UK. Many Unitarians – and the GA's management consultant – believed the Council was too big to be efficient, too expensive. So the (EC) replaced it. The EC had eight members, elected by 66 per cent of Unitarian voters.

Ten years on, two successive elections have been uncontested. Voting numbers have dropped with every election. Some members have left the EC, preferring to serve shorter terms or to focus on their own congregations.

This year there were no candidates for vice president of the General Assembly. That may or may not be related to the distance between the EC and its constituency. But it is understandable. In 2014 the EC rejected the only candidate, choosing instead to leave the office empty.

This is not directed at individuals currently on the EC or those who have served previously. They are volunteers who have worked hard and, we believe, done their very best for the movement. But some key decisions resulted in an undemocratic entity that serves neither its members nor its constituency well.

No one is allowed to attend EC meetings. Members decided to conduct the meetings as an Engagement Group – treating everything said in meetings in confidence. The 'Key Messages' of the meetings are bare-bones accounts. Minutes are filed away, beyond sight of those who paid to have them compiled. If voters don't know what EC members have worked on or how they voted on issues, how can they decide how to vote? When voters are not allowed to know the results of the election in which they have cast ballots, you cannot blame them for not bothering next time.

There is a simple solution: become a genuine democracy. Meetings of the EC should be open to quota-paying members of the Unitarian movement. A short section of the meeting should allow for questions from the floor. Proper minutes, offering a flavour of discussions and tallies of votes on policies and budget decisions, should be compiled and distributed in a timely manner. And election results – including vote tallies – should be reported.

There are practical considerations with meeting space and logistics. (Luckily, the movement has access to big buildings and meeting rooms up and down the country.) And there are electronic solutions. The Unitarian Universalist Association allows UUs to listen to UUA board meetings over the internet. A reporter from the UU World magazine attends the meetings and posts a report on the website. There is a policy that openness be the default position decisions.

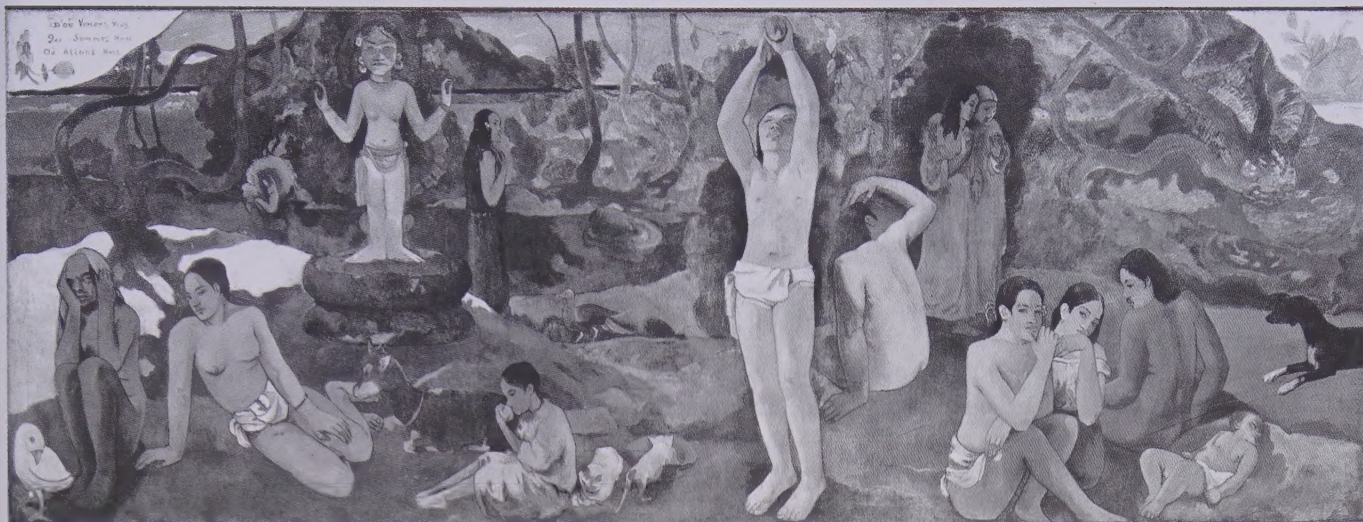
There will be times when proprietary information or personnel issues are discussed. In those instances the committee could go into executive session. But that should be rare.

If more Unitarians participate, they will feel more connected to the national movement. They may also have ideas, resources and much more else to share.

Every governing body in the world would prefer to do its work behind closed doors. It's easier. It's more efficient. But it is not democracy.

Ten years of secrecy is enough. It's been tried. And it is not working.

— MC Burns



Listening to our new Creation Story

By Erna Colebrook

The post-impressionist painter Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) first worked in Paris and Brittany then moved to Tahiti in Polynesia where he painted his most iconic pieces. He produced his masterpiece there, which is now in the Boston Museum of Fine Art. An oblong panel depicts men and women standing or sitting, mostly on their own. They all look pensive or downright glum. There is one group of three and also a quasi-religious figure in the background. In case we don't get the message, Gauguin has written it in the top left hand corner of the painting. It reads in French: *d'où venons nous – que sommes nous – ou allons nous*, which translates as – where do we come from – what are we – where are we going. These are the perennial questions philosophers and theologians have been grappling with over the ages.

One could begin by looking at the first question. If we find an answer it might help us with the other two. In the book *The Education of Little Tree* by Forrest Carter the young Cherokee Indian boy is given this advice: 'If you don't know the past, then you shall not have a future. If you don't know where your people have been, then you won't know where your people are going'.

Every culture has its own creation story, explaining the relationship between the human, the natural world and the divine. A creation story should provide the human with the ability to construct a balanced culture in harmony with the rest of the natural world. The ancient Greeks, the indigenous peoples around the world, all have or had creation myths – often involving a turtle, a snake or a dragon.

For the last two millennia our Western culture's dominant creation story has been the story told in the book of Genesis where God's spirit created the world and everything in it in six days. We read that He rested on the seventh and found it all 'very good'.

From the mid-16th century onwards there was an amazing development in the West: the birth of modern science: inquiry into the origin, structure and function of the universe. From Copernicus, Kepler, Galilei, Lyell, Darwin and very many others right up to the present with Fred Hoyle and the Big Bang theory. Here was a completely new experience for the human. Here was a new creation story. Scientists told us the universe was 13.8 billion years old, and that over those millions of years everything came into being through a sequence of evolutionary irreversible transformations. The universe passed from a lesser to a greater complexity in structure and from a lesser to a greater mode of consciousness. It is an unfinished 13.8-billion year journey.

The French priest palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Char-

din (1881-1955) declared that he saw the human emerging out of both the physical and the spiritual dimensions of the Earth. For the American priest, cultural historian and eco-theologian Thomas Berry (1914-2009) the universe is both a physical and a psychic reality. He wrote in his book *The Sacred Universe*, 'We will be able to appreciate the primordial unity of origin of every being. Through this unity of origin, every being in the universe is kin to every other being in the universe. This is especially true of living beings on Earth, all of which have descended through the same life process. Through this sharing in a common story, we come to recognise our total intimacy with the entire natural world. An impenetrable psychic barrier is removed. We are no longer alienated objects but communing subjects ... Every mode of being has the universe as context. In this manner, we circumvent the problem of anthropocentrism, which is at the centre of the devastation we are experiencing. We experience the Earth not through exploitation or isolation but through participation'.

These are challenging times. How do we reawaken much-needed awe, wonder and mystery and translate our cosmological sensibilities into the religious domain as advocated by Thomas Berry? For him a deep understanding of the history and functioning of the evolving universe is a necessary inspiration and guide for our own effective functioning as individuals and as a species. For him the universe is a single multiform celebratory event. In the human the universe is made conscious of itself.

The biblical story, however unique in what it offers, no longer seems sufficient to address the issues before us. We also need the story of our past and our dream for the future. Through the dream comes the guidance, the energy and the endurance we will need.

Most of us are familiar with the scientific story of the evolving universe. But it is much more than that. For Thomas Berry it is a sacred story. It is our new creation myth in the making, with a message for us. It should find an accepted place in our church life and worship. This could be in the form of readings, poems, responsive prayers – even songs or chants – describing the major transformations.

Above all we need to listen to them, perhaps regularly, and make their message our own. And we need to celebrate the sheer mystery. Such material may be hard to come by at present. But as TS Eliot wrote, 'In the vacant places, we will build with new bricks.'

Erna Colebrook is a member of Plymouth Unitarian Church. Painting above: 'D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?'

Paul Gauguin (Public domain), via Wikimedia Commons

Don't despair: we can make a difference

By Maud Robinson

The earth sustains not only our physical wellbeing but also our spiritual and emotional wellbeing. To care for the world we live in is a practical and pragmatic issue, but it is also a deeply spiritual and pastoral one.

In March 2015 the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a report saying the effects of climate change are already occurring on all continents and across the oceans; that the world, in many cases, is ill-prepared for risks from a changing climate, but that there are opportunities to respond to such risks, though they will be difficult to manage.

So it was with deep relief that I read a couple of hopeful and constructive articles in *The New Scientist* of 5 July, assuring us that all is not lost; that there are things that we can do as individuals; and as nations, if only the political will can be harnessed.

One was written by Chris Smith, outgoing chair of the Environment Agency. (And, incidentally, the son of Colin Smith, a former member of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.) Here's an edited extract:

Too often, we portray climate change and its consequences as a nightmare. But people don't want to believe in nightmares; they want to believe in hope. We need to articulate the debates and discussion around climate change in that context.

There is hope in this field. The environment in the UK has been improving over the last 10 or 15 years: the dramatic reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions; reductions in nitrogen oxide levels; reduction in the discharge of pollutants to rivers; and improved water quality, which has seen fish return to rivers from the Thames to the Mersey. There are otters in every county in England, which couldn't have been said a few years ago.

We've done that through a mixture of action, hard work, regulation and by bringing pressure to bear on polluters. Beyond that, there's a huge economic opportunity in environmental improvement, by saving money on existing processes and products, and bringing new products and services to market. There is scope for alliances, for getting countries around the world to agree and do things together.

At the personal level, there's a temptation to think, 'What can I as an individual do? If I recycle a bit more, if I make some energy efficiencies, if I travel less, if I try to generate less carbon – what's the use of that when China is building another coal-fired power station next week?' But that way lies disaster. If we all thought more positively – 'Yes, we can each do a tiny bit' – then it adds up.

Over the past 20 years householders in Germany have embraced renewable energy initiatives: there are solar panels and wind turbines everywhere. This was helped by feed-in tariffs, of course, but there was also a real surge in individual effort to embrace renewable energy. That has made a big difference to Germany's carbon footprint – all thanks to millions of individuals doing their own thing.

Individual action doesn't just make people think about themselves, but it reminds them why all of this is important. And that in itself is a good thing.

Every time we take the trouble to separate our recycling, we turn the heating down a few degrees (and I know I'm not good at that one), or we make active choices to buy more sustainable



A solar power plant on a former airfield in Briest, Germany. Photo by Gregor Rom via Wikimedia Commons

produce, we are making our tiny contribution and reminding ourselves of its importance. As church communities we can be more mindful of turning off lights and turning down our thermostats, wearing an extra sweater in winter.

In another *New Scientist* article, Robert Adler turns again to the global context. He asks: 'What would sustainable living be like? Would it be a drab, subsistence-level existence, or could we still have vibrant lives? Is a sustainable world economically viable, or even possible? Some argue that with renewable energy, sustainable use, reuse and 'upcycling' of resources and smart design we can have both sustainability and abundance.'

Adler suggests 'although challenging, the technological part of a transition to sustainability promises to be the easiest. The hard part – and it will be hard – is convincing economists, politicians and ordinary people to change how they live. To most economists, continual growth is a necessity and a slowly growing economy, or a 'steady state' economy that puts the health of the planet first, means catastrophe.'

However, the IPCC report found that early implementation of policies to reduce climate change, including a global carbon tax and deploying all relevant technologies, could keep CO₂ low enough to hold global warming below the critical 2°C threshold, and those changes reduce economic growth by a maximum of 0.14 % per year. The implication is that a sustainable world is economically feasible.

Adler suggests that, 'although most of us are not green crusaders, we are already changing our lives in ways that suggest the drive for sustainability may be pushing at an open door. But the challenge is breaking the historic link between prosperity and energy and resource use fast enough. Living sustainably need not be a step backwards. Some things will change though. Meat will become a luxury, as its cost is pushed up thanks to the huge amounts of energy and water needed to farm livestock. And while we'll still be able to take holidays, those weekend jaunts on budget airlines are likely to be a thing of the past because there is currently no tax on aircraft fuel.' All of which Adler suggests 'adds up to a vision of a sustainable world that is significantly different from the one that critics envisage. It might mean a leaner and slower way of life for some, but also a healthier, happier and more peaceful world for us and future generations to enjoy. We have the tools.

The Rev Maud Robinson is minister at St Mark's, Edinburgh.

Ethics and politics of Climate Change

By Alex Warleigh-Lack

This is an excerpt from a paper that will appear in the study pack on Climate Change to be launched at the Unitarian General Assembly meetings later this month.

The most authoritative assessment of climate change, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), reveals that human activity is largely responsible for the rapid rate of increase in the global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution. Human beings are simply emitting the so-called 'greenhouse gases' – chiefly carbon dioxide and methane – far more extensively than our planet can handle. As a result, global temperatures are increasing. If they rise by 4 degrees Celsius most experts believe the impact on ours and other species will be devastating. The time we have to mitigate the damage is limited; the time we have to prevent further damage is even shorter.

Clearly, a failure to prevent climate change would have major implications for our agricultural, economic and political systems. Crops traditionally grown in a given area may not adapt to new temperatures and weather patterns. Animal life will suffer similarly. Our current economy, predicated on the impossible fantasy of continued economic growth and exploitation of humans and the ecosystem, will fail. Our political systems will face new challenges such as food security, mass immigration from areas that have become uninhabitable, and, in all likelihood, widespread violence as people literally fight for their lives.

Such a catastrophe must simply not be allowed to happen. Fighting it is the primary moral task of our time. It's bigger than poverty, inequality, racism and sexism: if we can't preserve life-sustaining conditions for our species and others, it won't matter how equal, free or unprejudiced we are. We'll be dead.

That may seem extreme, but it is unfortunately accurate. The truth is bloody scary, not just 'inconvenient' in the wry terms of Al Gore's film.

So what are the ethical and political implications of this situation? There is no single answer. Different schools of thought have always drawn varying conclusions about the same question, and in green political thought and philosophy there are various approaches. However, I have attempted to distil the main ideas and principles of green/ecological thought below.

Central to ecologist beliefs is a rejection of anthropocentrism – the idea that humans are the source of all value and that humans should be predominantly concerned with their own species' interests. Anthropocentrism is considered mistaken and historically unusual: it is not as apparent in other cultures and times as in the post-Enlightenment West. For ecologists, humankind is part of a much broader and interdependent system of life on the planet, often referred to as Gaia.

For ecologists, political and social life requires a radical overhaul. Although local economies and communities are given centrality on the grounds of self-determination and local democracy – as well as to limit resource use – this must be seen in the context of a moral and ethical universalism. In ecological politics, developed nations have an obligation to citizens of so-called developing countries. To ensure all humans have a suitable quality of life, citizens of the global North will have to give up some wealth in a global redistribution process, enabling the South to live comfortably while avoiding the industrial path to material prosperity.

What does this imply for us as individuals and as Unitarians? Radical change and personal commitment to doing everything we can to contribute to change. The good news is that the paradigm shift required to respond to climate change will likely move us to a more fulfilling way of life, lived at a slower pace but with greater levels of satisfaction and psychological health. We can help build our futures by educating ourselves, changing our consumption habits, and voting and lobbying for green political and economic shifts.

On my arm I have a tattoo, a motto I devised to encapsulate my own process of spiritual, psychological and political change. It's just three words. The first highlights the importance of tuning in to the fact of ecological crisis; the second emphasises the possibility of thinking our collective way out of the problem; and the third reminds me of the need to take personal responsibility for contributing to the required transformation of our society, economy and politics.

Awaken. Envision. Act.

Please.

Alex Warleigh-Lack is Professor of EU Politics at the University of Surrey, where he is also Executive Director of the Centre for Research on the European Matrix. He is a member of Richmond and Putney Unitarians.



A shrinking Arctic ice floe. Photo by Paul Gierszewski

We must make changes

By Stephen Lingwood

It was a sobering and astonishing realisation to me that my nephew, born last year, is quite likely to live into the 22nd century. He will only need to live to the age of 87 to make it to the year 2100. But then the question becomes – what will the world be like in the year 2100? And that's when I start to worry. Because the international scientific community says if we continue the present rate of carbon dioxide emissions it could cause an increase in average global temperatures of 6 degrees Celsius by 2100.[i]

Six degrees may not seem very much but we're talking about a global average, not just warmer weather on any given day. A six-degree higher average will be hotter than this earth has been in 3 million years, when the northern hemisphere was entirely free of ice, and sea levels were 25 metres higher than today.[ii] I don't believe this will result in the apocalypse – life, and humanity, will continue to exist – it will be a radical change for our world and immense suffering for humans and other creatures.

A six-degree increase would result in higher sea levels, increased extreme weather, flooding and draughts in different parts of the world, and decreased availability of food and fresh water. The Amazon rainforest will become a savannah.[iii]

Mass extinction akin to dinosaurs'

The biological result will be a mass extinction event like the one that killed the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. The 20th and 21st centuries could be seen as a period of biological genocide: a mass extinction, the effects of which will take millions of years to recover.

This change in our environment will create huge social changes. If anyone thinks we have an immigration problem today, it will be nothing compared to the millions of climate refugees on our doorstep as the equatorial regions of the world become uninhabitable. These changes will affect the poorest most, those in the 'developing world', but they will affect all of us. Or, rather, they will mostly affect our children and grandchildren. I worry about the world we are giving them.

The effects of climate change are already observable. In the summer of 2012 a larger extend of the Arctic Ocean was open sea than at any time in the 200,000 years human beings have been on the planet. [iv] The 2012 Hurricane Sandy was the largest storm ever recorded in the North Atlantic, causing \$68 billion dollars' worth of damage to the United States.[v] The summer of 2014 was the hottest since records began in 1880[vi].

Scientists keep warning, in stronger and louder tones, about the effects of burning the fossil fuels of oil, coal and natural gas. In desperation they seem to ask, 'How many times do we have to say this? How many different ways do we have to say this? The industrial burning of fossil fuels by humans is changing our climate.'

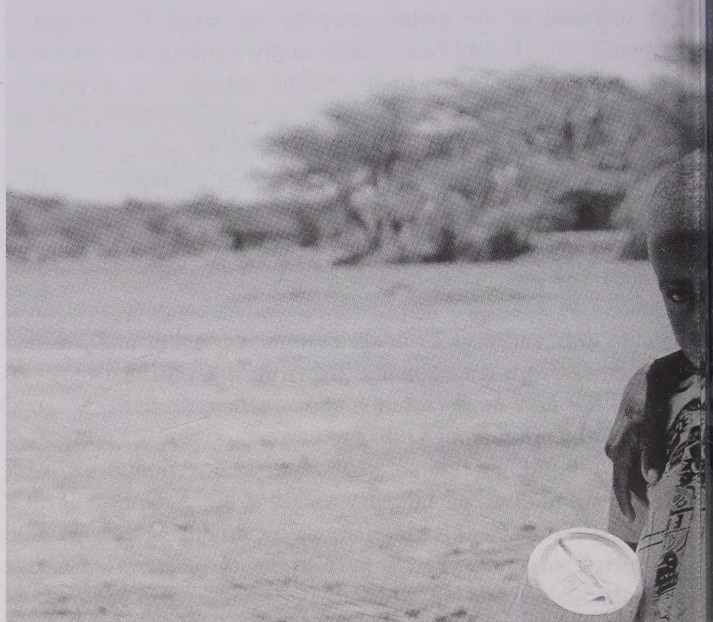
The scientists are more afraid than we are. Think about that: those who spend all their professional hours every day studying the climate are scared. Don't you think that means we should be too?

The world seems to agree this is a big issue, and yet, what do we do about it? Governments around the world continue to tolerate fossil fuels and give government subsidies to the fossil fuel industry.[vii]

12-step recovery from fossil fuels

We are addicted: addicted to fossil fuels. Maybe we've made some progress in admitting we have a problem, but we still can't help ourselves. We're not yet really serious about dealing with it.

To recover from our addiction we need, as in the 12-step recovery movement, to turn to the spiritual root of our addiction. This is not only a political or economic issue – this is a theological and spiritual



Two brothers aged 4 and 7 sought water in a dry riverbed near K... dug holes in the riverbed with a tin cup to scoop up enough to drink water and death of livestock. Photo by Marisol Grandon/UK Depa... issue.

There is a need for us, along with other faith communities, to develop new theology and ethics that turn us towards the Earth. Sometimes we are too concerned with individual salvation or 'getting into heaven' and do not pay enough attention to this world. Sometimes we think of ethics as loving our fellow humans, not considering extending that love to other species.

Going beyond 'Nature Spirituality'

But we need to go further. The danger is that we talk about a 'nature spirituality' but don't make the changes we need to make. Spending time in nature is important for our spiritual health. Going into the woods or the park or your garden – these are important spiritual practices. But in isolation, they miss the point. We must make work to change the world if we really want to show our love for nature.

We, in the rich part of the world, are addicted to a consumer mind-set that keeps us wanting more. We are obsessed with owning things. Owning is the 'greatest achievement' we can make. Think about how governments and political parties woo us with deals to 'achieve the dream' of owning our houses. This is supposed to be the biggest dream: owning something worth thousands of pounds.

But here's the truth (which all spiritual traditions unite to tell us) is impossible to own things. Ownership is an illusion. Our life on earth is short, and we take nothing with us, we only borrow things, and future generations need them.

Owning things has the opposite effect to what our spiritual selves want. Our deep desire is to connect to something greater, and yet we grasp after and cling to objects. This isolates us from the world. It causes suffering for ourselves and for others.

In the Jewish Torah there are regulations to leave farm fields fallow every seventh year. It's a practical agricultural policy to replenish

for the sake of our children



Learn more – suggested books

Akuppa (2009): ***Saving the Earth – A Buddhist View*** (Cambridge: Windhorse Publications). A guide to environmentalism from a Buddhist perspective. It is particularly helpful on the linkage between spiritual and political practice, and on recommending several practical ways in which we can all contribute to the fight against climate change.

Drengson, A and Devall, B (editors) (2008): ***The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*** (Berkeley: Counterpoint). An introduction to the work of the founder of the philosophy of Deep Ecology, Arne Naess.

Hamilton, C (2010): ***Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change*** London: Earthscan. An accessible introduction to the impact of climate change on our planet and human society, pithy and optimistic.

Litfin, K (2014): ***Eco-villages: Lessons for Sustainable Community*** (Cambridge: Polity) Part-memoir, part-philosophy, this draws on years of research to explain the extent of the eco-crisis and its political, psychological and economic challenges. It also suggests useful ideas about how humanity could respond to these problems.

Macy, J and Young-Brown, M (1998): ***Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*** (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers). This book draws on psychology, politics and Buddhist thought to develop ways to accept, transform and harness the despair that is often caused by full realisation of the extent of the ecological crisis.

Shiva, V (2005): ***Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*** (London: Zed Books). Written by a physicist and environmental campaigner from India, this draws on her years of research and activism to set out ideas about how we could remake our society in an ecologically sound and socially just way. – Alex Warleigh-Lack

in northern Kenya in 2011. With no access to clean water, the boys went through droughts across the Horn of Africa result in failed crops, lack of food and water. (UNICEF, 2011)

1. But the Torah also says it's *redemption*, a reminder that land is a free gift of God to the people. God says, 'with me you are but tenants and tenants'.

We have lost the idea we are but aliens and tenants. We think the earth is ours to use as we see fit. But what will be left for the next generation? What will be left for our children and grandchildren? If we don't love the earth, the living things on it now and in the future, we will not be able to give up ownership. We cannot be both owners of the earth and lovers of the earth. We must choose.

What does this mean, practically? There's not space here to get into all the issues. Climate change is the social problem of the 21st century. It affects every other problem in the world: poverty, war, economic justice. And it is caught up in the complexities of international politics, economics, and science.

This is what to do

But we can make simple and important changes to reduce the impact we have through our consumption of energy. We can use cars and planes as little as possible, reduce our household energy use and eat less meat. The main reason I don't eat meat is to reduce my effect on climate change. A planted field can feed 100 people. But if those plants are fed to animals eaten by humans only 10 people are fed. If you can't fully give up meat then weekly meat-free days could still have an impact.

But there needs to be more than personal commitments. Governments and economies must also change. One of the most effective steps we Unitarians can take as congregations and within the General Assembly is to disinvest stocks and shares from fossil fuel companies. I'm acutely aware that many Unitarian investments, including those of my own chapel, are in fossil fuel companies. The uncomfortable truth is that part of what pays our bills and pays my

stipend and pension, is profits from the extraction, selling and burning of fossil fuels. How can we condemn this practice if we are profiting from it? Things can't change overnight but we need a people's movement that moves our economy and politics away from dependence on fossil fuels.

Make a real commitment in Motion

When the climate change motion comes back before the Unitarian General Assembly in 2016, I hope it's not a purely wordy 'we are concerned about climate change' statement, but a motion with real teeth that says 'we are committed as a Unitarian community to begin a process of disinvestment from fossil fuels as a way to move our economic and political systems away from this industry that is costing the earth'.

That is one effective and real step we could take in making a difference. It's a step that was made last year by our sister Unitarian Universalist Association in the US. We need to make the same step.

Faith communities such as ours have a vital role to play in the public debates about climate change. We need to be the leaders – practically and spiritually – of a change in our society. We bring a spiritual perspective that can remind others that we are not owners; we are tenants. We have a religious tradition that calls us to love the earth. And we have grassroots communities in every town that can lead locally on these issues.

There is a long road ahead of us. Like any addict we will not be able to give up fossil fuels cold turkey. We will need to transition to a different way of doing things. But for the sake of our children and grandchildren, we must.

Stephen Lingwood is minister at Bank Street Chapel, Bolton.

[i] Michael Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (London: SPCK, 2014) 163; [ii] *ibid*, p 165; [iii] *ibid*, pp 164 - 165; [iv] *ibid*, p 1

[v] <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/assessments/pdfs/Sandy13.pdf>

[vi] <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/21/un-limit-climate-rise-warning-nicholas-stern-barack-obama-david-cameron>

[vii] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-27142377>

Priestly faced the same challenge

The next in an ongoing series of columns on ministry by members of the Ministerial Fellowship.

I began professional ministry in 1969 and retired 38 years later in 2007.

Comparing when I began with when I finished:

- First, apart from a brief three-year career with another profession, ministry was my primary full-time paid employment for the rest of my working life whereas for most of today's new ministers professional ministry is a mid-life career change.
- Secondly, I had two ministries both with single congregations – a short, five-year one followed by a much longer one of 33 years; whereas most of my contemporaries served two, three and sometimes more churches at the same time.

Today, 2015, I am a pew-sitting member of a Unitarian congregation in the north-east of England which for most of the past century has only had either part-time professional ministry or, as at present, no professional ministry at all. About once a month I take a chapel service taking care to emphasise that I do so as a member of the congregation and not as a professional minister, and I decline the always proffered fee; and although, in retrospect I realise that I could have sustained full-time professional ministry for at least a further five years beyond the state retirement age, I take care not to slide into the ministerial role by default. I do not want to diminish the congregation's healthy desire for its own minister. Yet I am aware that, for ministry, 'supply and demand' doesn't always balance; and that presently the supply of ministers is somewhat limited.

So I sit in 'the body of the kirk' and experience – almost (since I am a manse child) for the first time in my life – the weekly view from the pew: an extraordinary variety of differing worship styles brought by different lay worship leaders both home-grown and visiting, many 'well done' and others 'could do better'. The thing is that I don't really see this situation changing/improving any time soon – at least not in accordance with the traditional pattern of professional ministry. And yet, more by default than by intent, I observe, slowly emerging among us, a new and creative stream of ministry.

We are beginning to take – rather more seriously – a democratic revolution which first emerged towards the end of the 18th century when ministers in our radical dissenting tradi-

Ministerial Fellowship by Andrew Hill



tion began protesting that ministry no longer belonged to a specific professional group but to congregations as a whole. Joseph Priestley – who got ordained because his pension fund insisted that he must – understood this when he produced his *Forms of Prayer for Unitarian Societies* (1783): a book deliberately directed to Unitarian societies which either hadn't got round to professional ministry, or which couldn't afford professional ministry, or which didn't want professional ministry but which still needed resources and support for leading worship and many other aspects of congregational life. Unlike his friend Theophilus Lindsey who was desperate to find another ordained- and lapsed-Anglican to succeed him in Essex Street, Priestley directed his efforts towards the Unitarian laity providing them with encouragement and support and resources for exercising non-professional ministry from the pews rather than from the pulpit.

As a retired Unitarian minister I sense a real need for encouraging and developing 'the ministry of the pews'; and to this end and with another retired colleague I have recently been involved in leading both worship studies and rites of passage courses for members of Unitarian congregations in the north-east of England. Other such courses have been taking place in other parts of the country. The presence, encouragement and 'the benefit of experience' of professional ministers in supporting this new and emerging style of ministry seems welcomed by congregations whether or not they are searching for professional ministry. And should a congregation – like the one of which I am a member – be successful in its search for professional ministry, a trained team of individuals will be available in a supportive role.

The Rev Andrew Hill is a retired Unitarian minister.

New ministry partnership inducts Jim Corrigall

The Rev Jim Corrigall was inducted as minister to the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry and to Padiham and Rawtenstall Unitarian chapels. He is (pictured left) making his ministerial commitments to Dorothy Hewerdine, chair of the new Lancashire Collaborative Ministry, and to Tony Cann (centre right), President of Padiham Unitarian Chapel, and to Lawrence Forshaw, chair of Rawtenstall Unitarian Church. The service at Padiham Unitarian Chapel on Saturday, 28 February attracted more than 100 people.

The Rev Brian Cockroft, gave the charge to the congregation, saying this is 'a most imaginative model of ministry', one well suited to the 21st Century. In her charge to the minister, the Rev Jean Bradley spoke of the spiritual journey that brought Jim to Lancashire.

The service was conducted by the Rev Brenda Catherall.



What's in a nickname? More than you think

Congratulations to the Right Rev Libby Lane on her February appointment as the first woman bishop in the Church of England. More precisely, she is a suffragan bishop, a strange term that has a whiff of ecclesiastical obscurity about it. It means that she is a subsidiary bishop, able to function in a smaller diocese. There seems to be no complaint that it is a secondary role; one assumes she will make it to full status bishop in due course. Nor does anyone seem to mind that she uses a childhood nickname instead of Elizabeth. I wonder about nicknames. They usually indicate affection for the person concerned, but in the case of someone in a significant leadership position, doesn't a nickname risk a loss of gravitas?

And has anyone else, besides me, found themselves, at the sound of her name, bursting into the chorus of one of the Beatles' jollier songs? Did her former congregants 'There beneath the blue suburban skies' of Hale, in Cheshire, react in the same way?

The use of a helpful or unhelpful name prompts me again to ponder the mystery of our Unitarian name. There are plenty who are convinced we should change it, to make it easier for newcomers to understand who we are. I'm not so sure, and the other denominations don't seem too troubled by their names either. To the complete outsider, what does Anglicanism or even the Church of England actually mean? Or Methodist, Congregationalist or Baptist?

Imagine someone writing a book, 'Methodist? What's that?' Quakers seem content to stick with what was originally a derisory jibe, perhaps because their formal name, Religious Society of Friends sounds like a friendly society, which is not quite the same thing. Someone once commented that 'United Reformed' sounds like a football team that has been taken over by a press magnate. A local evangelical Christian church, formerly Carmel Pentecostal Church and latterly Skipton Christian Fellowship, has just changed its name to The Champions Church. Champions at what, one wonders?

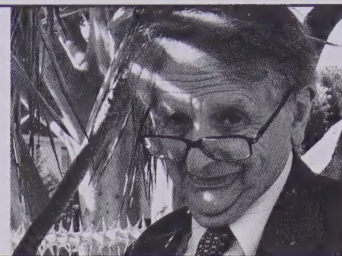
Changing their name?

This prompts me to look at football clubs in a similar way. Soccer is sometimes described as a religion, but that's an idea that shouldn't be pressed too far. Some soccer clubs have very strange names. The ones labelled for their city or town are obvious enough, until one discovers that many of the players and even managers do not come from that place, or even this country and several of the famous clubs are owned by millionaires from overseas. And Arsenal could be anywhere. Titles like Rovers or Rangers are barely comprehensible, after which things start to become very obscure.

Albion? Hotspur? Wednesday? Academicals? And how did Argyle manage to slip down from Scotland to the south coast of England? I don't ever remember a football club changing its name in an effort to attract more fans or to gain more points to get a higher position in the league; or should that be 'the conference'? Why 'conference'? There are probably historical reasons for all of these nomenclatures, and stories to tell as to how they came about. Just like the denominations. Football club devotees seem loyal enough despite these obscure names, and I can imagine howls of protest at any suggestion of a change.

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



The names of places sometimes attract unfortunate associations, hard to shake off. My wife Celia tells me that in her Todmorden childhood, the neighbouring town of Bacup was frequently described as the place 'where they look with their fingers'. More seriously, it is still difficult to mention the delightful Scottish town of Lockerbie without thinking of the terrible air disaster of 1988. In fact, the unforgettable way that Lockerbie townsfolk responded to that tragedy, giving help and hospitality to visiting relatives of victims, ought to attract nothing but praise. A recently released film that has attracted high commendation from the critics has a place name for its title. For those with strong memories of the Civil Rights movement in the US, the name Selma resonates loudly enough to know instantly what the movie is all about. As reported in a previous issue of *The Inquirer*, the story has a particular resonance for Unitarians, it being the occasion of the murder of Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev James Reeb. Watch the trailer on YouTube (see: <http://bit.ly/1124awr>) and there is a fleeting appearance of a thin, bespectacled man wearing a bow tie (at 2.07 minutes). That is James Reeb, a modern martyr. (At minute 1.52 Unitarian Universalist Viola Gregg Liuzzo is also seen. She, too, was murdered by racists in Alabama.)

Would I ever want to visit a place with a name resonant with bigotry and cruelty? I have just planned a summer holiday in Poland which will include a visit to Auschwitz, this year being the 70th anniversary of its liberation.

Now there's a name with strong associations. Given the opportunity, I hope I would visit Selma too, as I'm sure there are plenty of kind and decent people there. There doesn't seem to be a Unitarian Universalist congregation, but there is one in Birmingham, not too far away. That is a name that resonates with me, as Birmingham England is the place of my birth.

Back in my boyhood there were countless immigrants in that mighty, industrial city, from commonwealth countries, as well as Ireland. Many of them gave a much-needed boost to the staffing of public services. I have no recollection of serious race riots in the streets where I lived, though troubles around a notorious election campaign in nearby Smethwick were appalling. Often we tried to deal with issues of community relations and integration by telling jokes, some of which now make me squirm a little.

'How can you recognise a true Brummie these days?' we asked. 'By the spray of shamrock in his turban.' One that feels a little less uncomfortable asked the question, 'Why did job-seeking immigrants want to go to live in Birmingham England rather than Birmingham Alabama? In Birmingham Alabama they had to sit at the back of the bus. In Birmingham England they got to drive one!'

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

EC facing a crisis of leadership

To the Editor:

The members of Bury Unitarian Church have serious concerns about the problems facing the Unitarian General Assembly Executive Committee in recruiting people to stand for election to the committee.

The original vision for the EC seems to have been lost in that it is no longer a democratic body elected by the movement to govern and inspire it. To reach its required number of members it has increasingly relied on co-option and nomination, without a subsequent vote, as a way of filling vacancies. In neither of these cases is the movement at large given the opportunity to have influence in the make-up of the EC nor on the policies of its government.

We would like to ask what measures

the EC intends to take to address the serious and pressing problem of returning this body to its original vision of a democratically elected leadership.

Signed by the Rev Beryl Allerton

Representing

Members of Bury Unitarian Church

Perhaps we should free the Muslims

To the Editor:

Live and let live can sound like a good policy towards Muslims in the short term, especially outside the big cities. I am not at all sure that it will be reciprocated, especially in the long term. We know and sometimes love the fundamentalists, the people a West Highland friend of mine likes to call 'the Radical Christians'. My experience is that, given a chance, they never leave you alone. As a student I shared a hall with one and I was never left in doubt

of his tireless care for my soul. At present the numbers are on our side but, given the demographics of population growth among Muslims, the balance of numbers may become much more delicate for our grandchildren.

Besides, do we not have a reciprocal duty to free the Muslims from the shackles of their book? Perhaps the benefits of the Enlightenment and of the Higher and Lower Criticisms will by some mysterious osmosis filter through their defences in a few centuries, but do we not have a duty to ourselves as much as to them to press ahead with quiet scholarship, textual, historical and cultural, to examine the chains with which they are bound?

I am not here suggesting some intellectual counter-Jihad, just due diligence.

Iain Brown

Glasgow

B&FUA celebrates 100th anniversary

By Derek McAuley

The British and Foreign Unitarian Association Incorporated (B&FUA) has just celebrated its 100th Anniversary having been established in 1915. It is well known that the merger of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the National Conference formed the Unitarian General Assembly in 1928, yet the incorporated body survived this change.

Members gathered at Dr Williams's Library on 4 February for their annual meeting and a buffet lunch with Marion Baker, President of the General Assembly as honoured guest. The Association Officers; Alan Ruston (chair), Jeffrey Teagle (treasurer) and Derek McAuley (secretary) spoke briefly to the gathering.

The B&FUA is a company limited by guarantee and a charity. It has individual, not congregational, members who are invited to join on the basis of their experience and skills in governance, charity law and knowledge of the Unitarian and Free Christian movement. Currently there are 34 members; 11 of whom form its Executive Committee.

In the past 100 years 205 individuals have served, as listed in the now fragile Register, which has in consequence been deposited in Dr Williams's Library, with a new one being established. All have served loyally without payment acting in the best interests of the Unitarian cause.

The current Chair, Alan Ruston and Dr Anthony White are the longest serving members, having been appointed in 1968. They are a few years off the 50 served by one of the founders, Architect Ronald Potter Jones, who died in 1965. Of the 11 original members, two were Members of Parliament - John FL Brunner and Henry G Chancellor. Several were, of course, in the legal profession. Only one was a woman, Alice Bartram.

The B&FUA acts as the Custodian Trustee of many churches and other properties and holds these in trust on behalf of non-corporate bodies. We hold the historic Deeds and other documentation in the strong room at Essex Hall

making records available as required. Over the years this role has proved useful when local governance has broken down and has facilitated the appointment of new trustees and renewal.

Over £2.1million is held in trust from the closure of congregations with the income allocated to Unitarian bodies such as districts.

Other restricted funds relate to financial support for ministers and education. Grants of £77,000 are awarded each year. Over the years £665,852 has been accumulated from legacies and donations and the income, after administrative expenses, is donated to the General Assembly. This year over £28,000 was donated which forms an important part of the GA's regular and ongoing funding.

The B&FUA has always worked very closely with the General Assembly and the Chief Officer acts as Honorary Secretary. With its focus on governance, this enables a partnership approach in support of local congregations. In many ways it remains, however, a 'behind the scenes' organisation with which most Unitarians have no contact.

In this Anniversary year a special effort is being made to improve awareness of what the B&FUA actually does and a small pamphlet has been produced 'Celebrating 100 Years of Incorporation' which will shortly be given wide circulation in a GA Mailing. This explains in more detail the above functions. Thank you to Jeffrey Teagle for editing the publication and to James Barry for the design and for arranging printing.

Derek McAuley is Honorary Secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association Incorporated.



Derek McAuley

Historical Society honours Alan Ruston

Latest issue of society's 'Transactions' covers Unitarians in 'Nelson's Navy' (in spite of laws against it) and pays tribute to Alan Ruston's long service.

By David Steers

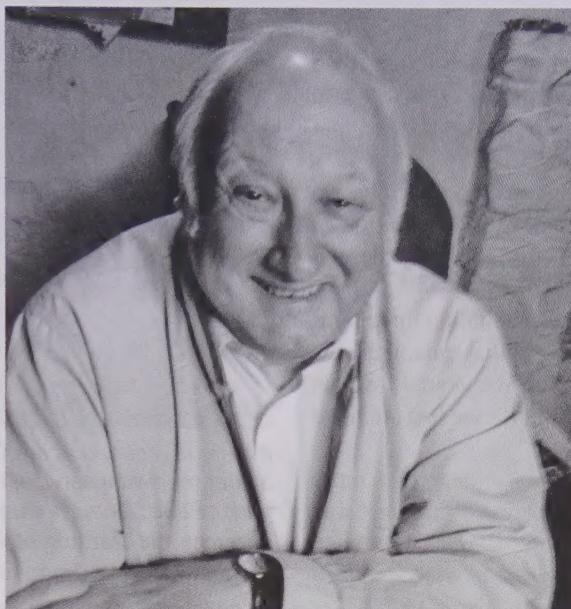
How many of us would associate Unitarianism with service in the Royal Navy at the Battle of Trafalgar? There is not an obvious connection here but in a new collection of Unitarian history essays Leonard Smith devotes a chapter to this phenomenon. Technically Unitarians were probably unable to hold commissions in the Royal Navy before 1828. Yet, inevitably, there were ways round this and Dr Smith outlines the careers of five distinguished Unitarians who served in 'Nelson's Navy'. To give just two examples these included Captain Edward Rotheram, who led a squadron at the Battle of Trafalgar and paced up and down the deck of his ship *Royal Sovereign* wearing a large cocked hat, which he refused to remove even though it made him a target for French snipers. Following the death of Admiral Nelson he headed the procession of captains at the front of the funeral carriage to St Paul's in London. In his career he not only faced dangers at sea but also a troubled relationship with some other officers – at one stage being accused of threatening his Anglican chaplain – a Mr Hoblyn Peter.

Yet throughout all of this he would appear to have been a thoughtful and devout Unitarian, keeping a *Commonplace Book* that displays very clearly his theological sentiments. Another Unitarian naval officer was Captain Thomas Thrush, who carried the news of Nelson's victory to Falmouth. Unlike Captain Rotheram, however, Captain Thrush converted to Unitarianism after his naval service and then engaged in vigorous pamphleteering against prominent Anglicans. He also became a pacifist and resigned his commission, literally at great cost to himself.

You can read the full fascinating stories of both of these figures as well as the other naval officers in this year's *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, which is produced as a special volume in honour of Alan Ruston. Alan is a noted Unitarian historian who also edited the *Transactions* himself for 25 years and this collection brings together eight scholars whose papers make up one of the most significant contributions to the study of Unitarian history for decades.

David Wykes investigates the challenges faced by Unitarians at the start of the 19th century in maintaining suitable institutions to train students for the ministry after the closure of Hackney Academy and Horsey's Academy in Northampton, particularly with regard to the position of poor students.

Two of the strands that help to make up the spectrum of the Unitarian movement are looked at by Daniel Costley, who deals



Alan Ruston

with the General Baptist Edward Hammond, minister of Bessels Green; and the present writer, who gives an account of the ministry of John Orr, an Irish Non-Subscriber, a radical theologian and a minister who ended his days amongst the Unitarians of Massachusetts.

Ann Peart examines the place in Unitarian history of William Gaskell – a figure surprisingly often overlooked; and Andrew Hill tells the story of a controversial legal case that engulfed St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel in York in the 1890s which had important implications for the development of Unitarian thought and worship.

The book concludes with a full list of all of Alan Ruston's published books and articles. The

Transactions will be sold in the shops for £12. At around 190 pages this is certainly good value. But it is free to members of the Unitarian Historical Society – and membership costs only £10 per annum. If you join now you will receive not only this special edition but also this year's Supplement containing reviews and other items. If you would like to join the Society please send a cheque (payable to the Unitarian Historical Society) to the editor – David Steers, 223 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast BT10 0LL.

The Rev David Steers is editor of Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society and a Non-Subscribing Presbyterian minister in Belfast.

Psychical Society marks anniversary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies. Founded in 1965 by Unitarian ministers the Rev George Whitby and his wife, the Rev Florence Whitby.

In the early days of the Society some great names were associated with it, such as Professor Henry Habberley Price, Wykeham Professor of Logic, and Fellow of New College Cambridge and Dr Robert Crookall from Aberdeen University. The biologist Sir Alister Hardy was a member from the early days and for many years the famous author, Arthur Koestler was a Vice-President of the Society.

To mark this special occasion, the society is holding its annual conference at The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow from 18-20 September. The key speaker will be the parapsychologist Dr Serena Roney-Dougal who will lead a day-long series of talks and workshops covering her research with Buddhist monks in Tibet, altered states of consciousness and the paranormal and spirituality.

The event is open to everyone, and you can come for the full weekend or just one day. Further details can be obtained from David Taylor at: editorusps@yahoo.co.uk or 07505 323443. For more information about the society see: www.ukunitarians.org.uk/psychical/home.htm

Memorable events — but not always for the right reasons!

By Kate Taylor

Memories of funerals tend to stay with us much longer than our memories of weddings or naming ceremonies, it was said when the Yorkshire Unitarian Lay Preachers' Association met at St Saviourgate Chapel, York, in January.

If that is the case, then it is the officiant's responsibility, we realised, to ensure that the funeral is a worthy celebration of the life that has gone, and that it will provide valuable and satisfying memories for the family and friends.

The occasion brought 17 of us together, including three ministers, for an interactive session focusing on funerals, facilitated by our new president, Stephen Carlile. We shared insights garnered from our own experience of funerals we had attended or, in some cases, conducted.

The worst funeral described was one in a place of a more orthodox denomination: the church was dingy, the priest was dour and knew so little of the dead person that he did not even get the name right. Not a happy memory!

We looked at a form provided by a Dewsbury undertaker with the (amusingly relevant name of Box) which prompted the living to make their funeral wishes known. But whether or not such a form is available, the first imperative when planning a funeral must be to talk with those who were nearest to the person who has died. They would contribute to the so-important eulogy. One of them might wish to deliver it. But we were advised to be a little wary if that were the case. The officiant should have a copy since the person speaking might break down and be unable to continue. And if the funeral were to be at a crematorium, the officiant should check the time it would take to speak the words. A retired minister told us of an occasion when, because of the time constraints at the crematorium, he had to cut an eloquent speaker short, with resulting aggro! Again, not a satisfactory memory.

The limitations on time at the crematorium were our next focus. How can there be a worthwhile celebration of a rich and varied life in the 25-minute slot that may be all that is available for the whole event? We talked of the value of having a short service at the crematorium, which was then followed by a memorial service at a place of worship where there would be an opportunity for a number of speakers, for impromptu comments, and for laughter as well as tears. Such a commemoration need not be on the same day as the cremation itself.

If the memorial service were to be later – perhaps because key members of the family were scattered across several continents – was any form of funeral service necessary at all? Those at hand might opt for no more than a no-frills cremation – or interment – itself.

A subsequent celebration of someone's life might take the form of a gathering to look at memorabilia and to share recollections in an informal setting. Participants might bring their own photographs and anecdotes. There was some anxiety that the insensitive might use the occasion to air grievances and then leave a rather miserable memory.

Thinking of burials led us to focus for a few moments on the moment of saying goodbye to the body. One of our number had led a funeral service for a youngish man who had died of motor neurone disease. She had officiated at his marriage only a very few years earlier and had named his daughter and



If there is a queue at the Crematorium, it's best to arrange for a later memorial service. Photo of Bath Crematorium licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

overseen the planting of a Rowan tree in honour of the child. At the graveside she invited those present to throw a sprig of rosemary into the grave while she threw a spray from the tree. Was this too ritualistic or too sentimental for Unitarians?

There are times when family members, from a different denomination, ask the officiant for readings, prayers or rituals that are alien to Unitarian traditions. A request to include the intercession, 'Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death,' would be an example. We could not say this with any sincerity. Yet it might be really important to some of those present. To deny their entreaty would leave a bad taste.

In officiating at a funeral, our task is to do our best to ensure the service will honour the person who has died and to meet with understanding and tact the wishes of family and close friends. We may well have to make some compromises. People will remember the event and we must hope that it is for the right reasons.

Kate Taylor is a member of the Wakefield congregation.

Music Society plans conference

The Unitarian Music Society's annual Conference is planned for 7-10 August at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow.

Singers and instrumentalists of all abilities are invited to join other music lovers for an opportunity for learning, sharing and enjoyment.

This year the society's 'major work' will be Elgar's *The Music Makers*, a short but wonderful choral work that sets one of Alfred O'Shaunessy's poems to music. Learned and performed over the weekend it will just be one of many musical activities as part of a comprehensive and varied programme.

As in previous years, there will be a chance for recorder players to get together. But this year there will also be an optional opportunity for those who have never played the recorder to learn some notes and make music.

There will be something for everyone, as well as time for rest and relaxation for those who want to take some time out. UMS warmly welcomes non-members to the conferences. In particular young instrumentalists and singers are very welcome. Subsidies available to those in full time education

For all enquires please contact Helen Merritt via telephone, 0151 625 5488, or email: richardandhelenmerritt@hotmail.com

— Helen Merritt